

Marketing & Sales

11 Ways to Hook Customers

by
John Graham

The challenge is the same for every salesperson. What it takes is capturing the customer's imagination. The competition isn't another brand or a better product or service. The competition is another salesperson, one who knows how to hook customers.

The primary task for every salesperson is getting customers to want to do business with them. Without that, customers move on, looking for someone who makes them feel comfortable—and it applies to everything from selling paint to political ideas. Here's what it takes to do it:

Stash your sales pitch. Of course, it's important to have your sales pitch down pat, but put it aside when you're with customers. It will only get in your way and be a barrier between you and your customers, causing you to talk more and listen less. Relying on it may boost your confidence, but customers don't want to hear it.

Don't assume customers know what they want. Don't be fooled, most customers don't know what they want, even though they say they do. They feel good—empowered—when a salesperson helps them discover new possibilities, what they didn't discover when “googling.” This gets them to see you as a resource for good ideas and helpful suggestions.

Figure out what's most important. Salespeople often act as if customers can hardly wait to hear what they have to say. It may not be intentional, but that's how they come across. In other words, *they don't stop talking*. Here's the problem: How can a salesperson find out what's important to customers if they're doing the talking?

Nigel Green of Relode.com says that the best salespeople ask more questions than those who are average performers. In his experience, they ask twice as many questions as they make statements or assertions. This is how they find out what's important to the customer, including Millennials.

Expand customer horizons. A business owner wanted to find a larger location to expand his business. He found a building that would work, one where everything was right—size, layout and location—everything, except the price. “It's a great place,” he told his banker, “but there's no way we can afford it.” After reviewing the information, the banker called and said, “Oh yes you can. I'll show you.”

Keep it transparent. Customers know that nothing is perfect. Trying to hide or whitewash something is futile; they'll figure it out. So, to get their attention and confidence, point out both the pros *and* the cons of what you're selling, as well as that of the competition. Be objective and fair. Build the case for what you're selling, but don't overplay your hand. Transparency creates trust.

Add to their knowledge. Not long after opening his art gallery on Newbury Street in 1976, Thomas Segal became "a significant force in Boston's art world," wrote *The Boston Globe* at the time of his death. "Year after year he introduced local collectors to art they might not otherwise have seen."

Commenting on Segal's success, New York art dealer Adam Sheffer said that when he was with clients, "He was phenomenally articulate. He was never trying to sell you something. Rather, he was trying to teach you something. The selling came along as a by-product." A good model for anyone in sales.

Map out the customer journey. If you want customers to stay with you, don't keep them in the dark. They'll become confused and bail out. Describe the journey so they know what to expect: 1) Ask them, what they're thinking about. Customers like to tell their story. 2) Let them know that you will help them explore the possibilities; 3) Then, knowing the options, they can make a decision.

Ask for their opinion. Whether someone buys or not, ask for their evaluation: what they liked and what they didn't, how you can improve, and if they'll recommend you to others and if not, why. Leave them feeling that they were working with a professional, someone who respects customers. You will also gain information that will add to your understanding of what's important to them.

Give them feedback. Although it may seem obvious, it's easy to forget that customers like to know where they stand, so let them know what you can do and what you can't, when you will get back to them, your understanding of what was discussed at a meeting, what you will do to prepare for a subsequent one, and what you expect from them. Being direct avoids misunderstandings and conflicts.

Pay attention to the little things. It's almost always the seemingly trivial things that upset customers, that drive them crazy. They are also the triggers that set off problems. Even so, a salesperson can help avoid such issues getting out of hand by taking note of a customer's likes and dislikes, what is confusing to them, or causes distress, and clearing it up quickly so it doesn't fester and become an unnecessary snag in making the sale.

Slow down the pace. It's easy for salespeople to lose customers by getting ahead of them; leaving them in the dust, as they say. They move quickly, while customers move more slowly. The customer is still thinking about what the salesperson said about the

new Camry's safety equipment and the salesperson is describing the JBL sound system. All of which causes unnecessary confusion and frustration. In other words, rushing ruins it.

John Graham of GrahamComm is a marketing and sales strategy consultant and business writer. He is the creator of "Magnet Marketing," and publishes a free monthly eBulletin, "No Nonsense Marketing & Sales Ideas." Contact him at jgraham@grahamcomm.com, 617-774-9759 or johnrgraham.com.